DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 303 885 EA 020 706

AUTHOR Pautler, Albert J., Jr.; Pautler, Marilyn J.
TITLE A Parents' Guide to Selecting a School for Their Children.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; *Curriculum Evaluation; *Educational Facilities; Educational Objectives; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Libraries; Parent Participation; Parent Responsibility; *Parent Role; *Parents; Parent School Relationship; School Choice; School Districts; School Effectiveness; Tax Rates; Teacher Student Ratio; Transportation

ABSTRACT

This book is a series of questions that parents can use in gathering information about the education quality of a particular school. These questions could be asked of school officials at the school being considered. The contents of this guide are divided into sections by topic: (1) school district philosophy/goals/objectives; (2) accreditation; (3) teacher/student ratios; (4) school district enrollment over time; (5) tax rate; (6) actual per pupil costs; (7) teaching ratios and staffing; (8) graduate history; (9) some district facts; (10) special services; (11) curriculum-based questions; (12) school-related activities; (13) library, media, and computers; (14) parental and community involvement; and (15) special schools and transportation. Appended are nine references. (SI)

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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SELECTING A SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILDREN

by

Albert J. Pautler, Jr., Ed.D.
Professor of Education
State University of New York at Buffalo
Amherst, NY

and

Marilyn J. Pautler
Williamsville Central School System
Williamsville, NY

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and Marilyn J. Pautler

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Published by

PAUTLER ASSOCIATES
50 BRAGG COURT
WILLIAMSVILLE, NEW YORK 14221
(716-634-8428)

EA 020 706

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

Ann M. Pautler
Mark G. Pautler
Mary B. Pautler
Michael A. Pautler

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Clifford Crooks

AND OUR SPECIAL THANKS TO

2 million teachers who care;

85,000 school board members;

in 17,000 plus school districts;

and nearly 1 million more personnel,

including cafeteria workers, bus drivers,

teacher aides, secretaries, and custodians;

plus 40 million school children in our schools.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Al and Marilyn Pautler

FOREWORD

In 1978 we published a book entitled, MOVING: A GUIDE TO SELECTING A SCHOOL SYSTEM, which was our initial effort of trying to help people who were moving from one location to another in their search for a school or schools for their children. Many changes in education and social conditions have taken place since that time and we have decided to publish another edition of our first book.

We decided to change the title of this edition to A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SELECTING A SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILDREN for several reasons. In our first book the implication was that only those people moving from one location to another would have an interest in the topic. The book served a good use for those trying to select a private school for their children and who were not in the process of moving. Therefore, we have selected a title which we hope will be more appropriate for this second edition.

We received many favorable comments from users of our first book as well as comments that have helped us in the preparation of this edition. In addition we had the opportunity to appear on television and speak on radio regarding our first book. CHANGING TIMES magazine listed our book in an article that they did on moving that resulted in many orders for the book.

Perhaps, the most interesting result of our first effort was the number of orders that we received from school districts and public libraries for the book. One school district asked if they could use our questions in a newsletter to the community. We of course gave our approval and they in turn stated the question and answered the question based upon data from their district. They in turned shared those newsletters with us. We would be pleased if more school districts took the time to do this.

The basic philosophy upon which the first book was based still remains. Where you live in the United States determines the school your children will attend UNLESS you choose to send your children to private schools. Where you rent or buy a home is the factor that determines the school district that your children will attend.

We realize fully that most educators and those that control education are attempting to provide the best educational program possible for the community. We in no way attempt to rate schools like restaurants or hotels with so many stars. Such an effort would be of limited value. Our goal is to encourage parents to hold schools and educators accountable for the education of their children. We suggest that parents may want to use some of our questions in their search for a school. Before using our suggested questions we assume that the users will review the entire content of the book and reflect on their individual

perceptions and goals of education based upon their personal desires for their children.

School quality is very important to families deciding where to rent or buy a home. Sometimes it may prove better to choose a somewhat smaller home, in a high cost area with am outstanding school system, than a larger home in a less costly area with an average school system. Such trade offs may be necessary depending upon the value system of the parent.

The user of this book must also realize that the quality and characteristics of schools can vary within any given district. Schools vary within a large city district. Some States have county systems of education which are very large in size and the quality of the schools can vary a great deal. Also, it is not uncommon in some areas to have children attend three different schools in order to complete their education. The child may attend an elementary school, then move to a junior high or middle school, and then to a senior high school. That is not at all uncommon at the present time.

We would like to thanks Dr. Clifford Crooks the former Superintendent of the Erie County (NY) Board of Cooperative Educational Services for his interest in our first edition of this work. Dr. Crooks assisted us in this second effort by reviewing our first book and offering many constructive ideas for this new version. In addition he reviewed our draft for this second version. Many thanks Cliff for your help and advice.

We as parents of four children are proud to say that all were educated in the public schools of New Jersey and New York including their university education. We have been very pleased with the quality of the education that our children received.

Albert J. and Marilyn J. Pautler

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INTRODUCTION

The user of this book will have attended and perhaps graduated from a public or private educational agency. The point is that the user has some solid experience with the educational system of this country--and that experience may have been favorable or unfavorable.

Now, as a parent of a school age child, you have demonstrated a serious interest in the education of your child or children in obtaining this book. The questions that are presented in this book are for your information and, if of concern to you in the education of your children, could be asked of the school officials in the school you are considering for your children.

The control of education in the United States is a major responsibility of each State. The United States Government with its' Department of Education is concerned with National policy issues and funding, which in turn reaches the various States. However, the local educational agency, is the agency most responsible for the operation of the public schools in the area.

The local educational agency (LEA) may be a rather small school district, perhaps even as small as 1000 students, or it may be as large as a major city such as Chicago or New York. In some areas of the United States schools districts will be organized at the county level. Maryland and Virginia are two states that are organized on a county level. Such arrangements in large counties may have 6000 teachers and operate 100 or more schools.

The local educational agency (LEA) is under the control of a board of education (BOE) which establishes policy for the agency and has control of the budget. In most areas members of the board of education are elected by those living in the area and serve without salary. In some large cities members may serve with some level of payment. The board of education is responsible for policy formulation and the quality of education at the local level.

When you find yourself moving from one area to another it is a good idea to check out the schools systems in the area you are moving into. Where you live will determine the school system and the schools your children will attend. Individuals relocating must give careful consieration to the exact location of school district boundaries when making the final arrangements for purchase or rental agreements. The best advise is that after you have made a decision on a location to check street number and name with the school district authorities to make absolutely sure you are buying within district limits. In many cases a street forms a school district boundary. Living on one side you may be

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

CLEAR SCHOOL MISSION

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND TIME ON TASK

FREQUENT MONITORING OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The contents of this guide are divided into sections by various topics. Within each section you will locate various questions which are then explained in more detail. Ideally you should take the time to review all the sections and questions and then decide which are the most important for you and your children. Those questions selected, and perhaps others that you have, could then be used when you contact school district authorities regarding various schools.

You will locate sections with titles such as follow: Philosophy; Objectives; Holding Power; District Growth; Gifted and Talented Programs; Special Education; Tax Rate; etc. One or more questions may be found in this various sections.

If moving from one area to another and if your children are already in school, it is a good idea to obtain records from the school about the needs and program that your children are in. It may be the policy of your district to forward these records directly to the new school that your children will be attending. The point is to find out as much about your children's needs from the district that they are attending and try to match those services with the new school district.

We suggest that you review the questions and comments and decide which are the most important for you to be aware of as you consider a school for your children. School officials should be pleased to answer any questions that you may have about their district.

1. SCHOOL DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY / GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 MAY I PLEASE HAVE A COPY OF THE DISTRICT APPROVED PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION STATEMENT AND THE DATE THAT IT WAS APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

Basic to any educational program should be the philosophy of the program. The philosophy of education within a district should give you some idea about the educational program. It is not unusual to receive a questioning look and defensive reply such as, " what do you want that for"? This is a defensive mechanism of many school people, who when put on the spot cannot find the philosophy statement of the district. Persist, and if need be, ask the person to mail it to you when it can be located. A statement of philosophy of education within the district should be available for your use and review.

1.2 MAY I PLEASE HAVE A COPY OF THE GOAL AND OR OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION FOR THE DISTRICT AS WELL AS THE DATES APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ?

It may be that a district will not have both a philosophy statement as well as objectives and goals. Some districts will have both, whereas others may have one or the other. Objectives or goals are generally more specific than a philosophy statement. They serve to spell out in more detail the basic intent of the philosophy statement. Your basic concern is to try to obtain as much information as possible about the direction of education in the district. If objectives and goals exist, and are current, you will have a basic idea that the district does some planning and is concerned with the direction of education and the quality of the program.

2. ACCREDITATIONS

2.1 WHAT ACCREDITATIONS BY EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES DO YOU HAVE AT THIS TIME AND WHEN DID THEY TAKE PLACE ?

In addition to the right to operate a school granted by the State, some schools will be evaluated and accredited by outside teams of professional educators. A number of different accreditation agencies exist and serve to accredit schools. One such is Middle Atlantic States Accreditation agency. The process is usually required every ten years. It is usually concerned with high schools only. School which have been accredited may indicate the fact on the transcripts of graduates from the school. The process usually involves a one year self-study by district staff, the preparation of a self-study document, and a site visit by educators representing the accrediting agency.

3. TEACHER/STUDENT RATIOS

3.1 WHAT IS THE STUDENT-TEACHER RATIO IN THE DISTRICT BY GRADE LEVEL ?

Most school districts allocate teacher and staff based upon a ratio of so many teachers per students in the school. As district enrollments increase more teachers would be required. As enrollments decrease fewer teachers should be required. Parents, should be mainly concerned about class size at the various levels such as; primary, elementary, middle or junior high, and senior high school. Ask about the total student enrollment in the district as well as the number of teachers. A district of 5000 students and 300 teachers would have a 16.6 ratio of students to teachers. The average class size for the district would be 16.6 students. However, the district may have established various staffing ratios by level. The district may have a ratio of 16:1 at the elementary level and a 25:1 ratio in the high school. As you tour the school that you are most interested in observe the class size in the various classes. Speak with teachers about average class size. The research on class size and teaching effectiveness is with mixed results. We generally assume that teachers can do a better job with smaller numbers in their classes, but, so much depends upon the ability of the teacher. Ask about student-teacher ratios at the level your children will be at in the school district.

4. SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLMENT OVER TIME

4.1 WHAT WAS THE PATTERN OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLMENT OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS ON A YEAR BY YEAR BASIS ? WAS THE DISTRICT IN A PERIOD OF INCREASE OR DECREASE ?

The answer to this question will give you some idea as to the growth of or decline on enrollment in the school district over the past five years. This may serve as an indication for the need for additional schools or for the closing of existing schools.

4.2 WHAT PROJECTIONS DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE REGARDING DISTRICT ENROLLMENT FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS ?

The answer to this question might help you understand what problems the district will face for the next several years. Of major concern would be rapid decreases in student enrollment or rapid increases. Closing of schools has been a major problem recently is some districts.

5. TAX RATE

5.1 WHAT IS THE PRESENT TAX RATE AND WHAT HAS IT BEEN OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS ?

The methods of paying for education varies from state to state. It is much easier for you to deal with rates within a state that you are already living within. If moving out of state you may be in for a pleasant suprise or a major shock. Levels of state and county support vary from state to state.

In most cases school tax is based upon assessed property value. The higher your property is assessed the more tax dollars you will pay. This assumes that you are buying property. If renting the cost of course is included within the rental rate.

Try to find out the tax rate over the past five years to determine the size of increases that you may be in store for. You may find figures like $72 per $1000 of assessed evaluation or $89, or $59, etc. But, compare rates over a period of five years to give you some idea as to what has been taking place regarding the cost of education in the community.

5.2 RELATED QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK.

A- What is the full value of all property per pupil ?
B- What is the tax rate per $1000 of full property value ?
C- How much property tax is collected per pupil ?
D- How much state aid is obtained per pupil ?
E- Are their any additional sources of school revenue ?
F- What about local or state sales tax ?
G- What about federal aid sources ?

6. ACTUAL PER PUPIL COSTS IN THE DISTRICT

6.1 WHAT IS THE ACTUAL COST OF EDUCATING ONE STUDENT FOR ONE YEAR IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ?

What you are trying to get at in this question is the actual number of dollars spent per child per year in the district. This will be an average across all levels and areas of instruction within the school district. When you compare these figures amoung districts you will have an idea of the differences in expenditures that exist. The U. S. K-12 grade average was $3413 for 1984-1985. Alaska was high with $6,867 and Utah was low with $2,183. Flordia was at about average with $3427/pupil. These figures can also reflex cost of living in these states due to teachers salary. Consider these figures carefully within the state your are in. It is

important, please consider it.

7. TEACHING RATIOS AND STAFFING WITHIN THE DISTRICT

7.1 WHAT IS THE TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AT THIS TIME ?

This response will give you an idea about the student size within the district. You may want to also ask about enrollment patterns over the past five years and projections for the next five years.

7.2 WHAT IS THE STAFFING RATIO WITHIN THE DISTRICT ?

An earlier question, 3.1, was concerned about student/ teacher ratios. This question will give you the opportunity to ask questions regarding administrative staffing and special services which may be of interest to you.

7.3 WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR TEACHING STAFF HAVE TENURE ?

This will give you an indication of the number of teaching staff who are relatively secure in their present positions.

7.4 HOW MANY YEARS DOES IT TAKE FOR A TEACHER TO BE GRANTED TENURE ?

This may vary from 3-5 years. It will serve as an indication to you of the probationary period that a teacher must serve in the district before being granted tenure. You may want to inquire about the process of granting tenure within the district.

7.5 HOW MANY TEACHERS ELIGIBLE FOR TENURE LAST YEAR WERE DENIED TENURE AND TERMINIATED BY THE DISTRICT ?

This may serve as an indication as to how serious the district is in making tenure decisions. A continual high number of tenure denials may also indicate a district that wants to keep costs down by hiring beginners and not granting tenure at the end of the probationary period. This is difficult to get a good grip on and may take some additional research on your part. Remember, it is possible for a child to go completely through grades K-12 and have a new teacher each year. We said possible, remember.

7.6 WHAT IS THE AVERAGE AGE OF THE TEACHING STAFF ?

This answer will only serve as one indication of whether you have a young, middle-aged, or older teaching staff. You will not be able to equate it with years of teaching experience.

7.7 WHAT IS THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE OF THE PRESNT TEACHING STAFF ?

This will only serve as an indication of whether you have a more experienced or less experienced teaching staff based upon average. An average is subjected to extremes based upon the number of teachers at either end of the continuum.

7.8 WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE TEACHING STAFF HAVE PERMANENT CERTIFICATION FOR THE POSITION THEY ARE IN ?

Each state has certain certification standards. A permanent certificate indicates that the teacher is fully certified by the state for the position. The alternative is usually temporary certification which is limited to a certain number of years which varies from state-to-state. The terminology of permanent versus temporary may vary from state to state and you will have to determine this based upon the comments from the person you are speaking with. Good schools attempt to employ fully certified and qualified teachers.

7.9 WHAT ACADEMIC DEGREES ARE HELD BY THE TEACHING STAFF?

a. What percentage of the teaching staff has less than a bachelors degree ?
b. What percentage of the teaching staff have at least a bachelors degree ?
c. What percentage of the teaching staff have at least a masters degree ?
d. What percentage of the teaching staff have a doctoral degree ?

8. GRADUATE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

8.1 WHAT PERCENT OF LAST YEAR'S GRADUATING CLASS WENT ON TO SOME FORM OF FORMAL EDUCATION SUCH AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE, FOUR YEAR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY?

This will serve as an indication of the ability of the school district to prepare children for college and have them accepted and enter college. It also may serve as an indication of the affluence of the parents in the community to provide for higher education for their children.

8.2 WHAT PERCENT OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS GRADUATING CLASSES WENT ON TO SOME FORM OF FORMAL EDUCATION ?

This question expands on the previous one in the sense that you want to see data for a five year period rather than for just one year.

8.3 WHAT PERCENT OF PAST GRADUATES DO IN FACT COMPLETE COLLEGE AFTER ENTERING FROM HIGH SCHOOL?

It is one thing to enter college upon high school completion and another to complete college. If you choose to ask this question you will have some interesting data available that may prove useful in your decision making process. It may be that the school district does not have this information or data available, but, "good" schools have this kind of information.

8.4 WHAT HAPPENDED TO THOSE STUDENTS WHO DID NOT CHOOSE TO ATTEND COLLEGE AFTER GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL?

This question will allow you the opportunity to find out about those students who did not enter college. A good school should have a solid data base regarding what all the graduates do after graduation. Do not expect schools to have this data for more than one or two years after a class has graduated--the numbers just get too large to have to survey classes after they are out of school for much more than a year or two. However, vocational schools and vocational programs should have this type of data avaialble for your use.

8.5 WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE GRADUATING CLASS THAT DID NOT GO ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION OBTAINED FULL TIME EMPLOYMENT?

If 50% of the last graduating class went on to college what happened to the other 50% ? Your concern here is for equal treatment of all graduates. It just may be that your child will not be able to or will not want to go on to higher education right after completing high school. Therefore you should be concerned with the role and function of the school in the preparation of students for employment.

Was equal treatment provided in the form of vocational counselling, vocational education, and job placement for those students not continuing to college ?

Generally, students exit school in one of three ways: FIRST, some go on to additional education; SECOND, some enter full time employment; THIRD, some enter the pool of the unemployed.

Comprehensive school districts should be equally concerned with all students--the college directed as well as those planning to seek employment.

8.6 WHAT IS THE SIZE OF THE PRESENT SENIOR CLASS? WHAT HAS BEEN ITS SIZE FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS?

This question will serve as an indication of the scope and

breadth of the programs available for students in as much as numbers of students determine to some degree, the number of course offerings a school may provide.

8.7 HOW MANY FULL OR PARTIAL SCHOLARSHIPS TO COLLEGE WERE AWARDED TO LAST YEAR'S GRADUATES? YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO FIND OUT THE SCHOOLS THAT AWARDED SUCH SCHOLARSHIPS AND WHY THEY WERE AWARDED.

The answers to these questions may serve as an indication of the ability of graduates to obtain scholarships for academic, specials artistic interest such as music, art, and dance, and sports. In addition you may want to inquire about National Merit Scholarship winners or awards, State scholarships, and scholarships to various military academies such as West Point, the Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, or the Coast Guard Academy, etc.

8.8 WHAT IS THE HOLDING POWER OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE STUDENTS WHO START SCHOOL DROP OUT BEFORE GRADUATION? ANOTHER MORE POSITIVE WAY TO ASK THIS QUESTION IS: WHAT NUMBER OUT OF EVERY 100 THAT START SCHOOL IN THE DISTRICT COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL?

Nationwide we are told from official data that about 27% of our 18 year old population do not graduate from high school. Some of those not graduating do go on to finish high school level education as adults. In the United States we have about 17,000 school districts which operate nearly 100,000 schools. Some 40 million school children are taught by 2 million teachers.

Over the past 10-15 years the percent not finishing high school has remained at the 25% level. We encourage you to ask this question and record the information for each school district that you visit. The information will give you a basic idea about the importance of education to the students and parents of the community.

9. SOME DISTRICT FACTS/SALARY/STAFF SIZE/PROJECT GROWTH/DECLINE

9.0 WHAT IS THE DISTRICT SALARY SCHEDULE FOR THE TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS ? BEING A PUBLIC AGENCY THIS SALARIES SHOULD BE PUBLIC RECORD. SCHEDULES VARY FROM DISTRICT TO DISTRICT AND SOME CAN BE RATHER INVOLVED AND DIFFICULT TO UNDERTSTAND. YOU MAY WANT TO REPHARSE THE QUESTION IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS*

a. What is the range of salaries for teachers with bachelors degrees ?
b. What is the range of salaries for teachers with a masters degree ?
c. What is the range of salaries for teachers with doctoral

degrees ?

d. What is the range, low to high, of present teaching salaries ?

e. What is the average salary of the teaching staff ?

f. What is the median salary of the teaching staff ?

The answers to these questions will serve only as comparisions between and amoung the districts you consider. You may expect tht better paying districts are able to appeal to more qualified teachers and have more applicants.

9.2 HOW MANY NEW TEACHERS WERE HIRED LAST YEAR ? HOW MANY NEW TEACHERS WERE HIRED EACH YEAR OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS ?

The answer to this question may serve as an indicators of a growing school district or one that is having a high turnover in the teaching staff due to retirements, deaths, or movement to other positions.

9.3 HOW MANY "NEW" TEACHING POSITIONS WERE CREATED AND STAFFED THIS PAST YEAR ? WHY WERE THESE POSITIONS ADDED ? WERE ANY COURSES DISCONTINUED DURING THE LAST FIVE YEARS ?

The answers to these questions should indicate if the district is increasing or declining in size or moving into new instructional areas. It also might serve as an indicator regarding class size in the district.

10.0 SPECIAL SERVICES OF THE DISTRICT

10.1 THIS SECTION CONCERNS GUIDANCE SERVICES IN THE SCHOOLS OF THE DISTRICT. WHAT IS THE RATIO OF COUNSELORS TO STUDENTS IN THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS ? (ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE OR JUNIOR HIGH, AND THE HIGH SCHOOL)

This item relates to the availability of guidance services in the schools and number of students assigned to each counselor. A good school system will have counseling services at all levels of the school organization and counselor to student ratio is a significant indicator of services that would be provided to students.

10.2 ARE SCHOOL NURSES OR NURSE-TEACHERS ASSIGNED TO ALL THE SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT ?

There is a difference between the roles of the school nurse teacher and the school nurse. The former is responsible for instructional services in the health area as well as first aid and health evaluations. The later is generally responsible only for first aid and medical inspections.

10.3 ARE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS EMPLOYED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ? HOW MANY ARE EMPLOYED AND WHAT SERVICES CAN BE PROVIDED ?

Try to find out about the services that can be provided and how many psychologists are on the staff or available on a consultant basis.

10.4 ARE SOCIAL WORKERS AVAILABLE AND EMPLOYED BY THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ?

Both of the previous questions relate to other pupil personnel services which may or may not be available within the school district. You may want to ask these questions to obtain indicators about the comprehensiveness of the total educational program in the district.

11.0 CURRICULUM BASED QUESTIONS--THE PROGRAMS

11.1 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE AN ADMINISTRATOR IN CHARGE OF THE TOTAL CURRICULUM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORT ?

The curriculum of the school is made up of the various courses and learning experiences that come under the control of the school. It is what school is all about. Your concern in this question is to determine who is in charge of the curriculum and the curriculum planning process.

Many districts will have an associate or assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum and/or instruction for the district schools. Others may have a curriculum coordinator for each program area such as English and mathematics.

The superintendent and board of education are responsible for the total curriculum of the school.

11.2 WHAT AMOUNT OR PERCENTAGE OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET FOR THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS ALLOCATED TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING ACTIVITIES ?

The answer to this question may give you an indication of the level of support allocated to curriculum planning and development effort in the district. You may request a copy of the most current school budget and ask for the location of the line item dealing with this topic.

In this day and age of educational reform and improvement of instruction districts should be very well aware of the need for curricular improvement.

11.3 ARE ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) COURSES AVAILABLE IN THE HIGH HIGH SCHOOLS ? IF SO, WHAT COURSES ARE OFFERED ?

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are college level courses that can be taken by advanced students in a number of different subject areas. Many college will award college level credit for the successful completion of these courses while the student is in high school. If your children are in high school and are planning to attend college, you may want to ask this question.

11.4 IS A SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE IN NEED OF ENRICHMENT, REVIEW, UPDATING, OR INTERESTED IN CERTAIN COURSES THAT DO NOT FIT INTO THEIR NORMAL SCHEDULE ?

Some districts may not offer a full summer school, but, may cooperate with another district to run a joint program. You may want to find out if bus transportation is provided for such programs.

11.5 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE A DISTRICT WIDE CAREER EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ALL CHILDREN ?

In the early 1970's many districts developed career education programs at all levels to help children develop a career awareness early in their development. Many districts have lost interest in such programs due to other pressures placed on the schools in recent years. But, it is suggested that you inquire about the state of career education in the district.

11.6 DOES THE DISRICT HAVE A PROGRAM FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN ?

If you have a child that you know or believe may be considered as gifted or talented in one or more areas you will want to inquire about special programs that would be of interest. These programs may be in English, mathematics, science, music, art, etc. You would want to learn as much about what programs are available and how they are presented. Also, how children are selected for them.

11.7 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE A PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS ?

You may due to a child with certain special needs want to find out how special education is provided within the district. You may want to inquire about the Committee on the Handicapped and how it functions within the school district. Parents of a handicapped child are usually well aware of what type of program is desirable for the child and would be advised to look into the program in detail.

11.8 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE A PROGRAM OF REMEDIATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ?

What types of remedial education are available for students in need of some special educational program ? If your child is behind in reading or math your concern would center on those areas. Ideally you would want to visit the classes and meet with the teachers that work in those areas of interest to you and your child.

11.9 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE SCHOOLS OR IN AN AREA VOCATIONAL CENTER OR SCHOOL ?

Depending upon the size of the district will usually determine if vocational programs are available in the district or in an area vocational center. Due to the high cost of some vocational programs you may find that a number a school districts come togther an form some type of intermediate district to provide vocational services. It may mean that a student will have to be bussed to another location for vocational programs.

Your major concern here is to determine if vocational programs are available. What programs and courses are available and where are they located. You may want to visit such facilities if your children are interested in such programs.

11.10- HOW ARE STUDENTS SELECTED FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS ?

In many areas vocational education is getting to be the selective form of education. That is, students who apply and are not accepted must go into the regular school programs. This is a major concern in some large city school districts in which entrance examinations are given for admission to vocational schools. Parents interested in vocational programs are advised to determine how the selection process works in the district.

12. SCHOOL RELATED ACTIVITIES--SPORTS-CLUBS-GOVERNMENT

12.1 WHAT INTRAMURAL SPORTS ARE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS IN THE DISTRICT ?

This question relates to opportunities for student involvement in sports either during or after the normal school day. The level of such school involvement varies a great deal amoung school districts. Good schools should provide opportunities for all children, not just those gifted, in physical activity at the varsity level.

Does the program include activities which can serve individuals on a life long bases such as golf, bowling, swimming, camping, etc.

12.2 WHAT VARSITY OR JUNIOR VARSIY SPORTS ARE AVAILABLE TO THE CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ?

What varsity sports are available in the district at the present time ? What about junior varsity sports ?

Are varsity level sports available for girls as well as boys ? What areas are presently available for girls ?

Are the coaches and teachers fully certified and qualified in the sports for which they are assigned ?

Does the school district have medical assistants present for sports programs in the event of a medical emergency ?

You may have additional questions of concern to you and your children on this topic.

12.3 WHAT SCHOOL RELATED AND SUPERVISED ACTIVITIES ARE AVAILABLE TO THE STUDENTS IN THE DISTRICT ?

This question relates to opportunities for student involvement in after school activities in clubs and other organizations. This can involve hobby interests such as chess, amateur radio, stamp collecting, computers, film and video production, photography, debating, science, etc. This could be a very lengthy list of topic. Your child may have certain interests. Student government and student newspapers and yearbook staff on themes that may interest certain students.

Are the teachers who supervise these programs skilled and trained in the area of concern ?

13. SPECIAL SERVICES/LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER/COMPUTERS

13.1 DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE AND MAINTAIN OR HAVE ACCESS TO ADEQUATE INSTRUCTIONAL EQUIPMENT ?

Your concern with this question is to determine the range of instructional hardware and software that is available for use in the instructional program. Does the district have a film library, television tape library, video recorders, film projectors, laser disc players, computers, etc.

Some districts may belong to larger services areas and share films and tapes from a larger source. You may want to ask about this in your discussions with school staff.

13.2 WHAT ABOUT THE SCHOOL LIBRARY ? YOU MAY WANT TO ASK TO VISIT THE SCHOOL LIBRARY.

Take the time to ask to tour the school library. See what it looks like. See how much activity is taking place and perhaps talk to the librarian.

13.3 WHAT IS THE STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT OF INSTRUCTION ON COMPUTERS ? YOU MAY WANT TO TAKE A TOUR OF THE FACILITY THAT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED FOR COMPUTER LITERACY.

You may want to determine if computers are available for student use at all levels in the district. How much actual computer time can a student expect during the course of his school year.

In addition you may want to determine how many computers and what types are available. Are these together in a network arrangement and what is the extent of the software library.

Computers may be available for student use. Make sure that you inquire about the formal curriculum that the district has developed for its students. Are courses in computer keyboarding skills required of all students ? Are courses in computer literacy required of all students ? How are the computers used in the instructional program in mathematics, reading, English, science, etc.

14.0 PARENTAL & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

14.1 TO WHAT EXTENT ARE PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ?

This will give you an idea of the amount of parental involvement in school activities. You are just asking of the person you are speaking with about his/her perception of the amount of parent input into the educational programs in the district, but, it will serve as an indication of community interst in the schools.

14.2 MAY I PLEASE HAVE A LIST OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE VARIOUS PARENT-TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS FOR ALL THE SCHOOLS ?

You may then use this list to contact the president of one or more of the schools in the district to gain input from parents of children in the school district. You are encouraged to contact at least one or two such parents to inquire about the extent of interest in parent-teacher organizations in the district.

14.3 MAY I PLEASE HAVE A LIST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE DISTRICT AND A COPY OF THE MINUTES OF OF THE MOST RECENT BOARD MEETING ?

You can then use these minutes to obtain an idea about the most recent issues facing the Board. You can then also contact a member or two of the Board to discuss his/her view of the district.

14.4 IT IS SUGGESTED THAT AS YOU TOUR THE DISTRICT THAT YOU STOP BY A REAL ESTATE AGENTS OFFICE OR TWO AND INQUIRE ABOUT THE VARIOUS SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE AREA.

Ask them about their perceptions of the various districts in the area and their own experiences with the schools as a parent. Also, ask them about any written information that they may have regarding the schools in the area. They would have up-to-date data on school taxes for your review.

14.5 STOP INTO SEVERAL SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE AREA AND ASK THEM ABOUT THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOCAL SCHOOLS IN THE AREA.

These people do business in the community and may live in the community. Ask then about their perceptions of the schools in the area.

14.6 TOUR THE SCHOOLS WHILE THEY ARE IN SESSION

Ideally, stop into the schools that you are interested in while they are in session. Ask for a walking tour of the building. Ideally, have your child or children with you. After all your children are the ones who will be attending the school. Give them a chance to talk to the teachers and students as your time permits.

15.0 SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND TRANSPORTATION

15.1 WHAT SPECIAL SCHOOLS ARE AVAILABLE IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ?

Does the school district sponsor or have access to any special schools ? You may consider area vocational schools as special schools. If you are moving into a large city you may find a large number of special schools. These may be called magnet schools and have special themes, such as, math science, performing arts, City Honors, etc. These can be great schools for some children, but, in the long run may cause skimming away of the better students from the more so called "generic schools" in the city. Examine this type of situation very carefully.

15.2 WHAT TYPE OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM DOES THE DISTRICT HAVE ?

School districts will have some type of transportation system to move students. Some districts will have their own busses, others may contract for bus service, and still others may use bus cards on public busses in the area. Check it out to see how the system operates.

You should also be concernd with how far children will be transported to school. Many districts have zones that will vary depending upon the grade level of the children. High school children amy have to walk within a two mile zone and elementary children with a one mile zone. Ask about the district policy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We assume that by this time you have had the opportunity to review the contents of this book. The PARENT'S GUIDE TO SELECTING A SCHOOL FOR THEIR CHILDREN is our second effort following our 1978 book MOVING: A GUIDE TO SELECTING A SCHOOL SYSTEM. The title was changed so that this new book might appeal to a greater range of readers.

The theme of the book is not an easy one to deal with since the authors are both involved in public school education. Their four children all have graduated from public schools in New York State. Three have graduated from the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Management and the fourth will be a senior in the School of Business at the State University of New York College at Geneseo. We have been very pleased with the public education system in New York State. We were active in school affairs while our children were in the public schools.

Now that you have reviewed our suggested questions we do hope that you will ask those questions of interest to you as you meet with school officials. Remember, where you buy or rent a home or apartment will determine the school district and schools your children will attend. That is of course unless they will be selecting a private school. Then your options are up to you. These same questions should apply to your choice of a private school as well.

We would like to hear from you regarding your use of this book. We would like your input for the next edition that we publish. Thank you and the best of success to you.

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7. WHEN YOUR CHILD GETS A REALLY BAD TEACHER (1979). This was an article in the November 1979 issue of BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS magazine. It may be of help to you if you ever face this type of situation.

8. WHAT MAKES SCHOOLS GREAT (1984). Theme article in the August 27, 1984 issue of U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT. It may be of help to you in your search for a school district.

9. BACK TO SCHOOL--AND BACK TO BASICS (1983). Theme article in the September 19, 1983 issue of U.S NEWS AND WORLD REPORT. May be of interest if you are in need of information on the back to the basics movement.

WE THE AUTHORS
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marilyn and Al Pautler are the parents of four children. The children are Mark, Ann, Mary, and Michael. All four children were educated in the public schools of New Jersey and New York. All four graduated from Williamsville South High School which is located in Western New York State. Three have graduated from the School of Management of the State University of New York at Buffalo and one is in his junior year at the State University of New York College at Geneseo.

Marilyn is a nurse by training and for the past ten years has been employed in the Williamsville Schools in a variety of positions. Marilyn was active in school affairs and parents groups while the children were in school.

Al is a Professor of Education at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is in the area of Educational Aministration and specializes in vocational education and instructional systems design. He has written ten books and over fifty articles for professional publication.